

United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400

(202) 224-5364

305

May 22, 2019

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to support your proposal to authorize carriers to block unwanted robocalls by default, and to encourage you to consider further actions within the Commission's authority to halt the scourge of illegal robocalls.

Combatting illegal robocalls has long been a focus of the Senate Aging Committee, which we lead. Over the past six years, the Committee has held 22 hearings to examine scams targeting older Americans. Scams we have highlighted include the IRS imposter scam, the Jamaican Lottery scam, computer tech support scams, grandparent scams, elder financial exploitation, identity theft, and the notorious "Drug Mule" scam.

Typically, these scams are initiated by robocallers who use caller-ID "spoofing" to perpetrate their schemes. When the Do-Not-Call Registry was created in 2003, telecommunications equipment could not easily be used to "spoof" a caller ID. Unfortunately, the emergence of Voice Over-Internet Protocol technology – or "VoIP" – in recent years has changed all this. Now, criminals can use VoIP to hide their identity while generating millions of robocalls from anywhere in the world at practically no cost.

This problem is getting worse. Last year, the FTC logged an incredible 3.8 billion robocall complaints, and this year industry sources estimate that nearly half of all mobile calls will be fraudulent. The American people are tired of having scammers ring their phones off the hook, and they want these calls stopped.

For this reason, we believe consumers will welcome the Commission's proposal to allow carriers to block these illegal robocalls by default, and we are hopeful that it will be adopted at the June 6th meeting. We also welcome the Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking creating a "safe harbor" for carriers to block calls that are not authenticated under the SHAKEN/STIR framework, and we look forward to progress on this proposal as well.

That said, experience shows that scammers are ruthless and clever at targeting their victims, and will likely continue their efforts to find even more ways to skirt the rules. For years, our

Committee has stressed the need for regulators and the business community to work together more aggressively to stop scammers from using VoIP and other technologies to facilitate fraud. We note that the Commission's Enforcement Bureau has asked U.S.-based VoIP providers to work with other carriers to trace illegal robocalls back to their source, and about the steps they are taking to identify and stem the flow of robocalls originating via their networks. We believe that expanded efforts to engage all VoIP providers to stop robocalls at their source holds great promise and are an excellent complement to the proposals the Commission will consider at its June 6th meeting.

Again, we welcome the proposals you have recently announced, and we encourage you to consider further actions within the Commission's authority to halt illegal robocalls and protect our nation's seniors.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
Chairman



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Ranking Member

cc: Commissioner Michael O'Rielly
Commissioner Brendan Carr
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner Geoffrey Starks



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

June 14, 2019

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chairwoman
Committee on Special Committee on Aging
United States Senate
G31 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Collins:

Thank you for your letter supporting my recent proposal to help consumers block unwanted robocalls by default. Combatting unwanted robocalls has been my top consumer protection priority since becoming Chairman. We have tackled this complex challenge with a comprehensive approach—though rulemaking, enforcement actions, and consumer education—in addition to our collaboration with other government entities and industry.

During my tenure as FCC Chairman, I've had the opportunity to set the agenda for 28 monthly meetings. At almost half of those meetings, we've voted on measures to fight unlawful robocalls and caller ID spoofing. We've taken action to cut off robocalls and spoofing at the source, including authorizing carriers to stop certain spoofed robocalls. We've authorized the creation of a reassigned numbers database. And we've proposed to use the authority Congress gave us in last year's RAY BAUM'S Act to expand the reach of our anti-spoofing rules.

And in one of the biggest steps yet, at our June meeting, the FCC adopted my proposal to allow phone companies to establish call-blocking services as a default setting for consumers. This was paired with another proposal related to call-blocking—a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding a safe harbor for carriers that block phone calls that are not properly authenticated under the SHAKEN/STIR Call Authentication framework, including a proposal for the Commission to mandate adoption of the SHAKEN/STIR framework if major voice service providers fail to implement the framework by the end of the year. I'm optimistic that these steps will make a significant dent in this problem, which generates the most consumer complaints to the Commission.

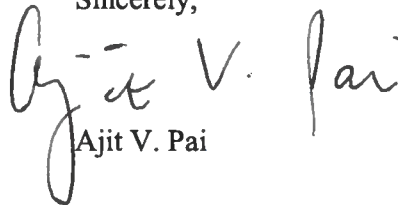
In addition, the Commission continues to aggressively enforce the Telephone Consumer Protection Act as well as the Truth in Caller ID Act. We have sent a clear message that those who engage in illegal robocall schemes will pay a price. The FCC coordinates with the Federal Trade Commission on investigations into violations of our Do Not Call rules, and we work together on consumer education programs. The Commission also works with federal and state agencies to share information and resources that can be used to investigate unwanted calls, such as the Department of the Treasury, Department of Justice, and Department of Homeland Security. Finally, we alert consumers about robocall scams, such as a recent "one-ring" advisory

issued this month warning consumers about scam calls using three-digit country codes for Mauritania or Sierra Leone and hanging up after a single ring.¹

I also appreciate all the work your Committee has done on this issue to help protect senior citizens—one of the more vulnerable group of consumers. The good news is that everyone—the Commission, Congress, the Federal Trade Commission, Attorneys General, consumer advocates, and the carriers—are all working to help end the scourge of unwanted robocalls. Notably, the Commission’s work here is fully in line with, and a complement to, the important work the Senate has done in crafting the Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence Act, or TRACED Act—important legislation that I hope soon becomes the law of the land. I remain hopeful that, working together, we can make an impact.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the signature, the name "Ajit V. Pai" is printed in a standard black font.

¹ The “One-Ring’ Phone Scam” advisory is available at <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/one-ring-phone-scam>.



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

June 14, 2019

The Honorable Bob Casey
Ranking Member
Committee on Special Committee on Aging
United States Senate
628 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

Thank you for your letter supporting my recent proposal to help consumers block unwanted robocalls by default. Combatting unwanted robocalls has been my top consumer protection priority since becoming Chairman. We have tackled this complex challenge with a comprehensive approach—though rulemaking, enforcement actions, and consumer education—in addition to our collaboration with other government entities and industry.

During my tenure as FCC Chairman, I've had the opportunity to set the agenda for 28 monthly meetings. At almost half of those meetings, we've voted on measures to fight unlawful robocalls and caller ID spoofing. We've taken action to cut off robocalls and spoofing at the source, including authorizing carriers to stop certain spoofed robocalls. We've authorized the creation of a reassigned numbers database. And we've proposed to use the authority Congress gave us in last year's RAY BAUM'S Act to expand the reach of our anti-spoofing rules.

And in one of the biggest steps yet, at our June meeting, the FCC adopted my proposal to allow phone companies to establish call-blocking services as a default setting for consumers. This was paired with another proposal related to call-blocking—a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding a safe harbor for carriers that block phone calls that are not properly authenticated under the SHAKEN/STIR Call Authentication framework, including a proposal for the Commission to mandate adoption of the SHAKEN/STIR framework if major voice service providers fail to implement the framework by the end of the year. I'm optimistic that these steps will make a significant dent in this problem, which generates the most consumer complaints to the Commission.

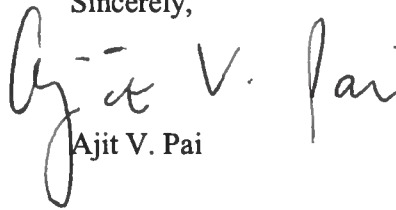
In addition, the Commission continues to aggressively enforce the Telephone Consumer Protection Act as well as the Truth in Caller ID Act. We have sent a clear message that those who engage in illegal robocall schemes will pay a price. The FCC coordinates with the Federal Trade Commission on investigations into violations of our Do Not Call rules, and we work together on consumer education programs. The Commission also works with federal and state agencies to share information and resources that can be used to investigate unwanted calls, such as the Department of the Treasury, Department of Justice, and Department of Homeland Security. Finally, we alert consumers about robocall scams, such as a recent "one-ring" advisory

issued this month warning consumers about scam calls using three-digit country codes for Mauritania or Sierra Leone and hanging up after a single ring.¹

I also appreciate all the work your Committee has done on this issue to help protect senior citizens—one of the more vulnerable group of consumers. The good news is that everyone—the Commission, Congress, the Federal Trade Commission, Attorneys General, consumer advocates, and the carriers—are all working to help end the scourge of unwanted robocalls. Notably, the Commission’s work here is fully in line with, and a complement to, the important work the Senate has done in crafting the Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence Act, or TRACED Act—important legislation that I hope soon becomes the law of the land. I remain hopeful that, working together, we can make an impact.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ajit" being the most prominent part.

Ajit V. Pai

¹ The “One-Ring’ Phone Scam” advisory is available at <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/one-ring-phone-scam>.